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SUBSTANCE ABUSE: TREATMENT, PREVENTION AND DETENTION

Forced Drug Addiction Programmes: Therapeutically or Politically Motivated?

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In the early 1970s, drug addicts could only be cured of their addiction by committing themselves to a strict in-patient programme, such as those offered within specific therapeutic communities (Maxwell Jones). The therapeutic results, however, were usually inconclusive. Some patients were “cured” up to a certain level and within a certain period of time, while others showed no change whatsoever, or worsened clinically.

It is current judicial/political practice, however, to place drug addicts convicted of repeated criminal offences in specific penitentiary programmes. This means that they have to prove, over a period of roughly two years, that they are no longer drug-dependent; only then do they become eligible for probation.

It has to be said that the therapeutic results are likely to be minimal. Such patients lack the motivation to participate fully in such programmes because their consent is not given in absolute freedom. It is hard to imagine, therefore, that these compulsory prison treatment programmes could ever offer any real hope of success above their non-compulsory equivalents in the 1970s. There is every reason to believe that today’s therapeutic programmes within the prison system are primarily politically inspired, in response to society’s growing intolerance towards drug addicts in general, and to their criminal behaviour in particular.